

Washington, DC – Having made accountability, transparency and bipartisanship the themes of his work in legislation and on local issues, Congressman Joe Sestak (PA-07) discussed with Bob Edgar, President and CEO of Common Cause, ways to offer citizens comprehensive information about actions of their elected officials. In addition, they talked about steps that could be taken to ensure that voters have both access to views of candidates for public office and the ability to make their opinion count at the polls. —

“Our government can only operate most effectively if there is full disclosure of officials’ actions and the influences that impact their decision-making,” said Congressman Sestak. “I am taken by the commitment of Common Cause to holding government accountable for working in the best interest of the American public as well as engaging more people in democracy in general and their efforts in particular. The American people are fortunate to have a dedicated public servant in Bob Edgar advocating for them as he continues to champion the values upon which our nation was founded.”

Bob Edgar, who represented Pennsylvania’s Seventh House District from 1975-1987, has headed Common Cause since 2007. Among the issues that the organization has recently given top priority to are: increasing the diversity of voices and ownership in media; making media more responsive to the needs of citizens in a democracy; protecting the editorial independence of public broadcasting, advancing campaign reforms that make people and ideas more important than money; making certain that government is open, ethical and accountable; and increasing participation in the political process.

Today’s discussion touched on these issues and included dialogue about ways to make voting less difficult. One proposal was to reduce wait times at the polls through fair allocation of funding for all communities and another was to decrease confusion through a standardization of polling machines.

Furthermore, the Congressman expressed his support for a reasonable public financing system that would permit the public to acquire as full and accurate understanding as possible of candidates’ beliefs. As Edgar noted in their conversation, in Connecticut 81 percent of candidates won a campaign through public financing rather than private financing.

“The most important point on which Bob and I agree is that 2008 is very much the same as

1974 in that voters still want accountability in government,” said Congressman Sestak. “On top of the specific concerns we addressed today, I pledge to continue to push for legislation that establishes an independent ethics commission, a push that Bob started when he arrived on Capitol Hill. Members of Congress must recognize that we serve to benefit the people we represent. We should be held to the highest ethical standards, especially in regard to avoiding activities that compromise our ability to accomplish this objective.”

Proposed by the Congressman in the Independent Ethics Commission Act, the above-referenced commission would be composed of retired federal judges that would be allowed subpoena power to investigate alleged violations by Members, and employees of the House of Representatives, and present a case of probable ethics violations to the Ethics Committee. It would allow for outside groups and individuals to file ethics complaints to be reviewed by the independent ethics commission.

Today’s meeting compliments Congressman Sestak’s ongoing efforts to restore transparency to government, something he has particularly emphasized with regard to the economic crisis. In addition to involvement in Congressional hearings examining the root causes and effects of the turmoil in our economy, Congressman Sestak has written to Secretary Paulson last month noting that the “restoration of public confidence in our governmental and financial institutions can not begin until the American taxpayers see consistent enforcement of the oversight provisions – and behavior from the financial institutions acknowledging that many of them share the responsibility for the economic crisis that has engulfed our country and the rest of the global economy.” Therefore, it is most incumbent upon Congress to ensure full transparency through accountable oversight of the actions taken by the Federal Government – correcting the absence of these which led to the market’s failure.

Furthermore, the Congressman wrote to Speaker Nancy Pelosi in November to ask her to join him in demanding Secretary Paulson follow the accountability measures specified in the Stabilization bill and calling on the Democratic leadership to accelerate the assignments of positions on the Congressional Oversight Panel so that it could meet its requirements for supervising use of taxpayer funds. The final appointments were announced on Thursday 21 November, more than 6 weeks after the bill was originally passed by the House and Senate.

Congressman Sestak also has sent a letter to United States Attorney General Michael Mukasey requesting him to “conduct an appropriate and thorough investigation into any and all financial institutions, corporations, and individuals that are suspect of criminal action relating to our current economic crisis.”

*Born and raised in Delaware County, former 3-star Admiral Joe Sestak served in the Navy for 31 years and now serves as the Representative from the 7th District of Pennsylvania. He led a series of operational commands at sea, including Commander of an aircraft carrier battle group of 30 U.S. and allied ships with over 15,000 sailors and 100 aircraft that conducted operations in Afghanistan and Iraq. After 9/11, Joe was the first Director of "Deep Blue," the Navy's anti-terrorism unit that established strategic and operations policies for the "Global War on Terrorism." He served as President Clinton's Director for Defense Policy at the National Security Council in the White House, and holds a Ph.D. in Political Economy and Government from Harvard University. According to the office of the House Historian, Joe is the highest-ranking former military officer ever elected to the Congress.*

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